The Global Politics of Anti-Racism: A View from the Canal Zone

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As the United States moved forward with plans to add a third set of locks to the Panama Canal in early 1940, the Panamanian government was intent on making sure that history did not repeat itself. When the U.S. government first oversaw the construction of the canal through Panama in the early twentieth century (1904–1914), a "gold roll" of mainly white U.S. citizens carried out skilled work, while a "silver roll" of workers, the majority from the West Indies, did the semi-skilled and unskilled work under worse conditions and with inferior pay. Besides determining wages and benefits, gold or silver status also determined access to housing, cafeterias, hospitals, clubhouses, and other facilities in the Canal Zone.[1] The initial construction period left behind a system of segregation in the Zone in which race was mapped onto nationality: with few exceptions, to be a non-U.S. citizen was to be defined as non-white.

When U.S. officials began to recruit workers for the third locks project nearly three decades later, Panamanian ambassador Jorge Boyd appealed to U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt to insist on employment practices better suited to the times. First, he advocated for Panamanians' right to occupy gold positions, reminding Roosevelt of "the

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[1] Initially, some West Indians and Panamanians were hired into skilled positions, and some black U.S. citizens were hired to the gold roll, but the color line dividing gold from silver and reserving skilled positions for white U.S. citizens was gradually strengthened over the course of construction. On labor in the Canal Zone during the construction period, see Michael L. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama, 1904–1981* (Pittsburgh, 1985); Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York, 2009); Greene, "Spaniards on the Silver Roll: Labor Troubles and Liminality in the Panama Canal Zone, 1904–1914," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 66 (Fall 2004): 78–98; Gerardo Maloney, *El Canal de Panamá y los trabajadores antillanos: Panamá 1920, cronología de una lucha* (Panama City, 1989); Yolanda Marco Serra, *Los obreros españoles en la construcción del Canal de Panamá: La emigración española hacia Panamá vista a través de la prensa española* (Panama City, 1997); Luis Navas, *El movimiento obrero en Panamá, 1880–1914* (Ciudad Universitaria Rodrigo Facio, Costa Rica, 1979); Velma Newton, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850–1914*, revised ed. (Kingston, Jamaica, 2004); Eyra Marcela Reyes Rivas, *El trabajo de las mujeres en la historia de la construcción del Canal de Panamá, 1881–1914* (Panama City, 2000).

principle of equality" between Panamanians and Americans, which had become so important to relations between the two countries in recent years.[2] While previous U.S. administrations had justified the United States' actions in Latin America with an implicit claim of Anglo superiority, in the newly inaugurated "Good Neighbor" era, U.S. officials eschewed such posturing in favor of a message of Pan-American fraternity that could generate hemispheric unity as the rest of the world descended into war.

Yet while Boyd insisted on Panamanian equality, he was equally adamant about black West Indian inferiority.[3] U.S. officials had returned to the British West Indies for labor recruitment, and the Panamanian government protested the initiative. Echoing sentiments then shared by many "Latin" Panamanians, Boyd impressed upon Roosevelt the "unlimited damages to Panama" that had resulted from past recruitment of this "undesirable race."[4] Requesting that Zone officials hire white Spaniards instead of black Caribbeans, he explained, "Panama has been anxious to improve its race and considers this a very happy opportunity to do so." From Boyd's perspective, forgoing black labor would be the ultimate Good Neighbor gesture: "A better and more practical evidence of real cooperation to the welfare of our nation could not be offered by the United States."[5]

As World War II unfolded, however, a discernible change occurred in the place of race in U.S.-Panamanian relations. Abandoning efforts to simply refashion the racial hierarchy in the Canal Zone, Panamanian officials began to denounce its existence altogether. At the 1944 meeting of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Panamanian government took to the global stage to condemn the "principles of frank racial discrimination" undergirding the gold-silver system and to highlight the irony that the United States would treat an important ally in this manner in a war that was largely inspired by pernicious theories of racial hierarchy. "I can testify to the profound resentment, bitterness and doubt felt by every one of these men when they hear appeals to their solidarity in the fight for democracy," the Panamanian delegate affirmed.[6]

[2] Memorandum presented by (Ambassador) Jorge E. Boyd to the President of the United States, February 9, 1940, enclosed in Ambassador Jorge E. Boyd to Foreign Minister Narciso Garay, February 9, 1940, Embajada de Panamá en EUA, vol. 86: Boyd, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Panamá, Panama City [hereafter MRE Panama].

[3] On West Indians, West Indian Panamanians, and race in Panama and the Canal Zone, see Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*; Kaysha Lisbeth Corinealdi, "Redefining Home: West Indian Panamanians and Transnational Politics of Race, Citizenship, and Diaspora, 1928–1970" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2011); Michael E. Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone* (Durham, N.C., 2014); Marixa Lasso, *Erased: The Untold Story of the Panama Canal* (Cambridge, Mass., 2019); George Priestley, "Ethnicity, Class and the National Question in Panama: The Emerging Literature," in Aubrey W. Bonnett and G. Llewellyn Watson, eds., *Emerging Perspectives on the Black Diaspora* (New York, 1990), 215–237; Maloney, *El Canal de Panamá y los trabajadores antillanos*; Newton, *The Silver Men*; Trevor O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama, 1914–1964* (Lanham, Md., 2006); George W. Westerman, *Los inmigrantes antillanos en Panamá* (Panama City, 1980); and Katherine A. Zien, *Sovereign Acts: Performing Race, Space, and Belonging in Panama and the Canal Zone* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2017).

[4] Boyd memorandum to the President of the United States. The problematic term "Latin Panamanian" refers generally to Spanish-speaking, Catholic Panamanians. Not incidentally, the invocation of "Latin" foregrounded the Hispanic ancestry and obscured the indigenous and African ancestry of those who identified with the term. On the concept of "Latin America" in the region more broadly, see Michel Gobat, "The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race," *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (December 2013): 1345–1375.

[5] Boyd memorandum to the President of the United States.

[6] *International Labour Conference, Twenty-Sixth Session, Philadelphia, 1944: Record of Proceedings* (Montreal, 1944), 126–127.

The Second World War disturbed the prevailing politics of race. The appearance of German and Japanese theories of racial supremacy as purported antonyms to Allied values gave leaders of countries perceived as non-white a new means to engage a rapidly transforming global community and to challenge the aspiring leaders of that community. The notion in the West that there was an inherent connection between race and "fitness for self-rule," long a dominant organizing principle for power relations around the globe, came into crisis during the war and remained under assault in its wake.[7] White supremacist beliefs, once an explicit rationale for U.S. international leadership, became, increasingly, a liability.

But the global politics of race are more complex than a sole focus on international hierarchy allows. By the end of the war, anti-racist internationalism appeared to the Panamanian government to be a more powerful message for asserting legitimacy than parsing the nuances of who should be excluded by whom. But by pivoting rapidly toward anti-racism in the international sphere, the Panamanian government exposed itself to cries of hypocrisy from champions of anti-racism at home. West Indians in Panama and their Panamanian-born children, long engaged in struggles against racial hierarchy on the isthmus, scoffed at the ILO delegation's grandstanding, retorting that institutionalized discrimination against West Indians in Panama was "the weak spot in [the delegates'] otherwise impregnable armor." "One cannot with any degree of justness protest against a condition being imposed upon him that he is imposing upon others," a West Indian Panamanian newspaper editorial declared. Panamanian politicians and labor leaders were themselves "blinded by the prejudice and narrow nationalism that have been the cause of all the distress and horror in the world today."[8]

It is politically powerful to imagine a singularly racist world under assault by the combined forces of anti-racist struggles around the globe at mid-century. But it is more precise to imagine the racialized international order as one contested hierarchy capping a clumsy pyramid of countless others that operate at different scales—the enclave, the nation, the region. An aggrieved diplomat in the international sphere may well be an architect of oppression in the domestic one. The ideas about fitness for self-government that ordered international relations on the eve of World War II influenced domestic race politics in different ways in different settings—legitimizing imperialism, alienating anti-racist political visions, and bolstering innumerable articulations of supremacy in places where elites like Jorge Boyd perched atop their own hierarchies as they struggled, from the lower rungs of the international order, to project "civilization" and ascend. The disequilibrium that the discursive battle over race during World War II injected into international politics presented new opportunities for people struggling against racisms far from the front lines to challenge their oppressors.

A truly global history of the politics of race in this pivotal moment could not likely withstand the flattening pressure of grand narrative—but a deep dive into the rising currency of anti-racism in one place can expose the dynamic relationship between anti-racist struggles operating in different registers. The intermingling of scholarship on in-

[7] World War II was not the first time this "organizing principle" came under attack. Rather, the persistence of this framework stood in constant tension with a long history of anti-imperialism that promoted alternative geopolitical visions. The World War II era was distinct from earlier periods in the unprecedented degree to which Allied leaders began to recognize the threat that unabashed scientific racist thinking posed to their own global interests.

[8] "Zone Labor and the I.L.O.," *Panama Tribune*, April 23, 1944.

ternational relations and race in recent decades has done much to uncover the challenges that anti-imperialist struggles posed to racialized criteria for international legitimacy, on the one hand, and the impact of geopolitical conflict on domestic struggles for racial equality, on the other.[9] The entangled histories of anti-racism and anti-imperialism on the isthmus reveal the interplay between those two phenomena.

Latin America is frequently neglected in global histories because of the region's awkward relationship to twentieth-century timelines of decolonization.[10] The global history of race politics is no exception. But what makes Latin America so valuable to this particular global history is the very same periodization "problem" that routinely leaves it on the sidelines. Most Latin Americans confronted the racialization of geopolitics, both before and after notions of "fitness for self-government" began to erode, as members of purportedly sovereign nation-states and active architects of international community. From the earliest days of independence, Latin American political elites navigated the politics of race in the international order against a backdrop of enduring battles over race and citizenship at home. In the twentieth century, workers, peasants, revolutionaries, and politicians engaged in ongoing efforts to reconcile eugenicist thought, racial diversity, ethnic nationalism, and fickle standards for international esteem.[11] In making sense of the relationship between race and politics in world history, the view from Latin America precludes escape into binary visions of a world divided between colonizers and colonized, a racist Global North and an anti-racist Global South, or a tidy color line that splits humanity in two.

The Western Hemisphere is especially fertile ground for teasing out the relationship between international relations and domestic race politics in the twentieth century. The Good Neighbor policy, World War II, the Cold War, and postwar decolonization offered Latin Americans a number of racialized vocabularies with which to reframe longstanding anti-imperialist frustrations with the United States and present them as both vital to global peace and security and moral beyond reproach. As race became disentangled from the right to sovereignty and a wave of decolonization transformed the makeup of the global community in the postwar era, many in Latin America began to reimagine the region's place in the world. Latin American leaders in roles like Jorge Boyd's pivoted away from a position of supplication to join the elite club of the white West, to claim instead a position of leadership in an emerging non-white Global South.[12]

[9] The texts that make up this vast literature are too numerous to list here, but for recent work reflecting on race and international order, see, for instance, Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, N.J., 2019). For a recent overview of the literature on race and U.S. foreign policy, see Paul A. Kramer, "Shades of Sovereignty: Racialized Power, the United States and the World," in Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed. (New York, 2016), 245–270.

[10] On the "decolonization divide" in global history, see Christy Thornton, "A Mexican International Economic Order? Tracing the Hidden Roots of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9, no. 3 (2018): 389–421.

[11] If Latin America is largely absent from global accounts of race and international politics, it is not for a lack of interest in historicizing race among scholars of Latin American history. For an introduction to the field, see Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, "Introduction: Racial Nations," in Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Rosemblatt, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 1–31.

[12] See Corinne A. Pernet, "Shifting Position to the Global South: Latin America's Initiatives in the Early Years at the United Nations," in Claude Auroi and Aline Helg, eds., *Latin America, 1810–2010: Dreams and Legacies* (London, 2012), 83–100.

The Panama Canal was born of U.S. intervention. When in 1903 the Colombian Senate obstructed U.S. efforts to secure canal rights through what was then the Colombian province of Panama, Theodore Roosevelt allied with Panamanian elites to declare Panamanian nationhood in return for the rights that he sought. Besides the canal itself, the U.S. obtained a ten-mile strip of land bordering the waterway on either side, creating a 553-square-mile territory under U.S. jurisdiction that cut the new nation in half. Frequent U.S. interventions in Panamanian politics over the succeeding decades and widespread disappointment in the benefits that Panama accrued by hosting the canal generated pervasive anti-U.S. sentiment in the republic.[13]

From its creation, Canal Zone labor policy was built on the scaffolding of intertwined racial and national hierarchies. The gold and silver wage scales and facilities were purportedly designed to be competitive with the rates of pay and amenities available to the workers that Zone employers sought to attract from the United States and the circum-Caribbean.[14] This approach created a Jim Crow–like system inside the Canal Zone that conflated race and nationality. While Zone officials often fell back on the claim that gold workers did skilled work while silver workers did unskilled work to further justify the disparities in their conditions and pay, in practice there were plenty of examples of silver and gold jobs that required performance of identical duties, such as "chauffeur" or "painter." In such instances, only workers' race or nationality could account for the roll to which they were assigned. Gold workers often made two to four times as much as silver workers in the same position, and had access to superior housing, stores, and recreational facilities. On the eve of World War II, gold-silver segregation continued to shape all facets of life in the Canal Zone.

Racial discrimination was also rampant in the Panamanian republic outside of the Canal Zone, though it was maintained through different channels and informed by different prejudices. Tens of thousands of black Caribbean migrants had come to Panama to work on infrastructure projects since the mid-nineteenth century—first to build the Panama Railroad in the 1850s, then during a period of French canal construction that was ultimately aborted (1880–1889), and finally during the period of U.S. construction that followed Panamanian independence from Colombia and resulted in the canal's completion (1904–1914). In the early decades of the republic, the West Indian worker became a symbol of "native" frustration with both U.S. power and the unfulfilled promise of Panamanian modernity. Many Panamanians viewed those West Indian workers who lost their canal jobs and moved into the republic at the end of the construction period as a burden on the nation, at the same time that they resented those who continued in Canal Zone positions for their seemingly privileged access to coveted Canal Zone jobs. With their English language, Protestant beliefs, and supposed refusal to assimilate,

[13] On the Panama Canal in U.S.-Panamanian relations, see Michael L. Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance*, 3rd ed. (Athens, Ga., 2012); J. Conte Porras, *Del tratado Hay-Bunau Varilla a los tratados Torrijos-Carter: Breve síntesis de la historia de las relaciones entre Panamáy los Estados Unidos, 1904–1981* (Panama City, 1981); Luis I. Fitzgerald, *Historia de la relaciones entre Panamá y Estados Unidos* (Panama City, 2000); Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1978); John Major, *Prize Possession: The United States Government and the Panama Canal, 1903–1979* (New York, 1993).

[14] During the construction period, for both populations the rates were slightly higher than comparable wages in their countries of origin. For U.S. workers, this was said to offset the inconvenience of moving abroad.

British West Indians were routinely portrayed as anti-patriotic accomplices of U.S. imperialism.[15]

Economic turmoil in the 1920s and 1930s fed the articulation of an increasingly anti-black and anti-imperialist "Latin" nationalism in Panama. The 1940 presidential triumph of Arnulfo Arias marked the peak of this trend in Panama. Arias's campaign slogan, "Panama for the Panamanians," encapsulated both the anti-U.S. and anti–West Indian sentiment at the core of his particularly exclusive brand of Panamanian nationalism, *panameñismo*.[16]

The Panamanian government regularly invoked the United States' Good Neighbor policy to frame demands around how labor policy on the third locks project should be executed. The Good Neighbor policy toward Latin America, proclaimed less than a decade earlier, was intended to counter the rising tide of anti-U.S. sentiment instigated by frequent U.S. interventions in Latin American affairs.[17] Beyond a pledge to end formal military interventions, the Good Neighbor policy became a way of speaking about a new era in U.S.–Latin American relations in which the United States would treat the other American republics as sovereign peers. This was meant to be a departure from the much-resented posture of paternalism toward Latin America that had defined U.S.–Latin American relations in previous decades. U.S. incursions in the Caribbean had often been carried out on the grounds of Latin Americans' insufficient fitness for self-government and varying notions of imagined U.S. superiority: Anglo over Iberian, Protestant over Catholic, white over racially mixed.[18]

The stakes of the Good Neighbor policy were never higher than during the Second World War, when strategists deemed unity in the Americas to be crucial to hemisphere defense. Advances in weapons and aviation technology in the 1930s changed U.S. strategic calculations by shrinking the distance between places. Now, strategists contended, the U.S. was only as secure as the other republics of the Americas.[19] In this context, goodwill in Latin America, imagined to be a safeguard against Nazi inroads, became a U.S. national security imperative.

The Good Neighbor policy in some ways prefigured the rhetorical elimination of

[15] Marixa Lasso De Paulis, "Race and Ethnicity in the Formation of Panamanian National Identity: Panamanian Discrimination against Chinese and West Indians in the Thirties," *Revista panameña de política*, no. 4 (July–December 2007): 61–92; Priestley, "Ethnicity, Class and the National Question in Panama."

[16] Anti-foreign black mestizo nationalism was a common development in other Spanish American republics in the circum-Caribbean with large numbers of West Indian migrants. See David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martin, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014); and Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2013). On the complicated figure and legacy of Arnulfo Arias, see J. Conte Porras, *Arnulfo Arias Madrid* (Panama City, 1980); and William Francis Robinson, "Panama for the Panamanians: The Populism of Arnulfo Arias Madrid," in Michael L. Conniff, ed., *Populism in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 2012), 184–200. On the rise of *panameñismo*, see Alberto McKay, "Las primeras crisis políticas, 1931–1948," in Alfredo Castillero Calvo, ed., *Historia general de Panamá*, vol. 3, book 2 (Panama City, 2004), 3–24.

[17] Though the Good Neighbor policy is most closely associated with the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, Roosevelt was building on a shift begun in the 1920s. The diplomatic history of the Good Neighbor policy has not been the subject of a monograph in more than twenty years. For a more recent textbook survey overview of the period, see Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States and the World*, 4th ed. (New York, 2012), chap. 4.

[18] On the various justifications for U.S. interventions in Latin America, see Alan McPherson, *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Chichester, West Sussex, 2016); and Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*.

[19] Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense* (Washington, D.C., 1989).

race as a barrier to sovereignty in the postwar world, but there was one crucial difference. Through the Good Neighbor policy of the 1930s, the U.S. extended fraternity and equality to Latin Americans not so much by renouncing racist ideas about fitness for self-government, but by expanding the boundaries of who should be treated as racially fit.[20] Panamanians seized on this in making the case for Panamanians' eligibility to join the gold roll. When negotiating a 1936 treaty with the U.S. that would be the hallmark of the Good Neighbor policy in U.S.-Panamanian relations, Panamanian diplomats elicited a guarantee that Panamanian citizens would have the same employment opportunities in the Canal Zone enjoyed by U.S. citizens.[21] The Panamanian government did not frame demands for equal opportunity with an ethos of anti-racism. To the contrary, the lead Panamanian diplomat in charge of negotiating the 1936 treaty insisted that the desired guarantee affirming Panamanian equality to white U.S. workers not include "any hint of an equality of a Panamanian with a Jamaican and a Negro."[22]

Indeed, in talks with U.S. officials about labor recruitment, the Panamanian political elite's objection to West Indian migration was a means of asserting whiteness, or else a mestizo identity of the same stature. Scholars have noted that immigration restrictions throughout the Americas during the interwar years were in part a way of signaling modernity to a global audience—testament to the fact that there was a superior body politic that needed to be protected from undesirable elements.[23] Panamanian immigration restrictions against black migrants instituted in the mid-1920s and late 1930s culminated in the Constitution of 1941, which permitted immigration only by those "capable of contributing to the ethnic, economic, and demographic improvement of the country"; expressly forbade immigration by those "of the black race whose mother tongue is not Spanish, the yellow race, and the races from India, Asia, and North Africa"; and stripped many Panamanian-born West Indians of their citizenship.[24] Nationalists in Panama wringing their hands over the coming deluge of black workers explicitly included among their concerns the potential impact of such migration on Panama's global standing. As the nationalist civic organization Afirmación Nacional put it in 1940, "their mixing with the daughters of this country is affecting the ethnic classification of our *pueblo*, with notable harm to our international prestige."[25]

[20] In the U.S., the Good Neighbor policy weighed on debates over the whiteness of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. See, for instance, Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941–1978* (New York, 2010), chap. 3; Thomas A. Guglielmo, "Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006): 1212–1237; Natalie Mendoza, "The Good Neighbor Comes Home: The State, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and Regional Consciousness in the US Southwest during World War II" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2016), chap. 2; Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, "Good Neighbors and White Mexicans: Constructing Race and Nation on the Mexico-U.S. Border," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33, no. 1 (2013): 5–34.

[21] This sort of demand was not new in the 1930s. The Panamanian government sought assurances on this front in 1908 and 1914, and the results were a small number of gold positions reserved for Panamanian citizens as something of a public relations matter. The advent of the Good Neighbor policy infused the issue with greater symbolic importance.

[22] Ricardo Alfaro quoted in Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 87.

[23] See Putnam, *Radical Moves*, chap. 3; FitzGerald and Cook-Martin, *Culling the Masses*, 21.

[24] Constitución de la República de Panamá de 1941. For an overview of the history of racialized immigration restrictions in Panama, see Virginia Arango Durling, *La inmigración prohibida en Panamá y sus prejuicios raciales* (Panama City, 1999).

[25] "La traída de antillanos es una violación de la leyes de inmigración de este país: La Sociedad Afirmación Nacional dirige importante carta al Dr. Augusto Boyd," *El Panamá América*, January 18, 1940.

The Panamanian migration ban specifically against non-Spanish-speaking black migrants encapsulates a key complexity in the nature of race and national identity in Panama and elsewhere in Latin America during this period: obviously, being black and being Latin American were not mutually exclusive. In fact, at this moment in Latin American history, people across the region were reckoning with the racial makeup of their societies and reimagining national membership. New ethnic nationalisms on the rise everywhere grounded national identity in a particular imagined cocktail of racial mixture that made a given *pueblo* unique. In countries with large Afro-descended populations, like Brazil, this meant embracing blackness (albeit in limited, conditional ways) as a component of the nation's makeup. In others, the focus was on embracing a fusion of indigenous and Spanish blood.[26] Nationalists in Panama pointed to the relative inclusion of Spanish-speaking, Catholic black citizens to support claims that West Indian exclusion had a cultural rather than racial rationale.[27]

Though this reimagining of national identity in more racially inclusive ways may at first glance seem antithetical to the simultaneous rise of race-based immigration restrictions, the two phenomena were in fact complementary. Ethnic nationalist projects took some inspiration from an older Latin American interpretation of scientific racism that reconciled Latin American demographics with Latin American elites' desires that their countries be taken seriously as peers by other Western nations. While eugenicists in the U.S. and Europe gravitated toward hereditary determinist theories of race that viewed

[26] The trend of reimagining race and citizenship during this period was region-wide, but given the demographic diversity of Latin America, the particular place of blackness or indigeneity in these processes cannot be generalized for the entire region. There are rich and extensive bodies of scholarship that examine the diverse national experiences with this process. For a small sampling of recent works that operate at the level of nation or subnational region, see the following: On Mexico, see Ariadna Acevedo Rodrigo and Paula López Caballero, eds., *Ciudadanos inesperados: Espacios de formación de la ciudadanía ayer y hoy* (Mexico City, 2012); Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson, Ariz., 2004); and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910–1950* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2018). On Cuba, see Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2005); and Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001). On Brazil, see Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2011); Alexandre Emboaba Da Costa, *Reimagining Black Difference and Politics in Brazil: From Racial Democracy to Multiculturalism* (New York, 2014); Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Durham, N.C., 2015); and Jessica Lynn Graham, *Shifting the Meaning of Democracy: Race, Politics and Culture in the United States and Brazil* (Berkeley, Calif., 2019). On Argentina, see Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, eds., *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina* (New York, 2016). On the transnational experience of Afro-Caribbeans in Spanish American republics during this process, see Putnam, *Radical Moves*. On nineteenth-century efforts to reconcile racial diversity with elite visions of political modernity in Spanish America, see Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810–1930* (Durham, N.C., 2007); and James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, N.C., 2014). For an introduction to important work in Afro–Latin American studies, including an excellent account of "racial democracy" and racial inclusion in Latin America by Paulina Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, see Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews, eds., *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (New York, 2018).

[27] Marixa Lasso argues that the presence of black West Indians in Panama even inadvertently helped to facilitate the integration of Afro-descended Panamanians who traced their roots in Panama to the colonial era, as the inclusion of so-called "colonial blacks" in the mestizo category bolstered nationalist claims that West Indian exclusion was a cultural issue rather than a racial one. "Race and Ethnicity in the Formation of Panamanian National Identity, " 67–70. Spanish-speaking black people also faced discrimination in Panamanian society; "inclusion" simply meant that they occupied a different rung toward the bottom of the ethno-racial hierarchy.

racial inferiority as immutable, many Latin American eugenicists had advanced scientific racist ideas that were less deterministic and allowed more room for environmental factors to shape populations.[28] This position allowed for the "improvement" of national stock to take place through assimilation, public health and education initiatives, the "right" kind of immigration, and miscegenation. Black immigration was antithetical to this aspirational march toward whiteness.

Concern about the impact of racial mixture on national identity inevitably gendered concerns about race and nation. "Mixing with our daughters" was a typical *panameñista* anxiety. When West Indian men and women married one another and raised English-speaking, Protestant children, they were accused of refusing to assimilate to Panamanian culture, but West Indian men who married Panamanian women were also held in contempt. In the meeting with Franklin Roosevelt in which Ambassador Boyd solicited Spanish labor in order to "improve" Panamanian demographics, his government offered to pay the added costs of transporting the workers from Europe on the condition that they live in Panamanian cities instead of Canal Zone housing, "so that they would mix with our natives."[29] When the governor of the Canal Zone tried to assuage the Panamanian government's concerns about West Indian labor recruitment by suggesting that if they allowed only male migrants, those workers would have greater incentive to return home after the work was completed and would not have children in Panama, Panamanian officials rejected the suggestion, arguing that such a plan would only result in West Indian men having sex with Panamanian women. Boyd reported that Roosevelt was sympathetic on this point, and had agreed that it was better if West Indian men bred ("*se enrazaran*") with "their own women" and "not with our [Panamanian] women."[30]

Confronted with these demands from a key wartime ally in the region, Washington wanted to be accommodating, and considered a number of other labor sources. The cost of transporting Spanish workers and the risk of importing fascist sympathizers doomed that particular suggestion. As an alternative, the Panamanian government requested laborers from elsewhere in Latin America. The governor of the Canal Zone rejected a proposal to bring workers from Puerto Rico, even though officials in Washington liked the idea for the extent to which it would also help alleviate unemployment on the island. In dismissing the plan, the governor expressed concern that Puerto Rican workers would fit awkwardly into the prevailing system in the Zone: "They could not be treated in the same way as white employees and yet as American citizens they would doubtless resent being classed with West Indian Negroes. Puerto Ricans would accordingly have to be housed, fed and paid on a different standard from any kind of labor now existing in the Zone."[31] Ultimately, over 22,000 workers came to the Canal Zone. Some 5,000 of them came from Jamaica, where they joined some 5,000 other laborers of West Indian descent who had remained in the Zone from earlier periods of migration

[28] See Nancy Leys Stepan, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991).

[29] Boyd memorandum to the President of the United States.

[30] Boyd to Garay.

[31] Duggan to State, January 23, 1940, 811F.504/203, Record Group [hereafter RG] 59, National Archives and Records Administration of the United States, College Park, Maryland [hereafter NACP]; memorandum of conversation re: Recruitment of Labor in the Construction of the Third Set of Locks of the Panama Canal, January 22, 1940, 811f.504/188, RG 59, NACP.

or had been born there.[32] The rest of the workers hailed from other Latin American countries, including 12,773 Salvadorans, 2,248 Costa Ricans, and 2,244 Colombians.[33]

Of course, the choice between Latin American workers and black workers was a false one. Records of recruitment efforts in Costa Rica noted that the men recruited there were, ironically, primarily West Indians and West Indian–descended Costa Ricans working on United Fruit plantations. Many black workers also came from Colombia, a nation where racial diversity resulted not just from migrant labor but from the legacy of colonial slavery. In response, the Panamanian government ordered consular officials to stamp the passports of only those recruited workers who appeared white or mestizo. When the governor of the Canal Zone complained about the pace of recruiting, the Panamanian president agreed to relax racial restrictions on the Colombian border on the condition that black workers be kept inside the Canal Zone upon arrival, a fact that exposes the falsity of cultural explanations for West Indian exclusion.[34]

The arrival of tens of thousands of workers in the Canal Zone who brought with them ideas about racial hierarchy ill-suited to the Zone's binary color line strained an already contentious system as different racisms collided.[35] Latin American workers resented that U.S. authorities placed them in the "colored" category. One Colombian reported to his home newspaper that in the labor camps, Colombians lived "intermingled with the black race—Jamaicans and Antilleans—a frightening people of horrifying vulgarity."[36] Segregation was offensive both for what it suggested about Latin Americans' inferiority to U.S. citizens, and for what it suggested about Latin Americans' equivalence to West Indians.

Canal Zone officials relied increasingly on "foreign" versus "U.S." classifications to police the separation of gold and silver workers in a way that could sidestep the troublesome gap between workers' own racial identities and Zone officials' perceptions of their race. Responding to an inquiry about the number of black employees working in the Zone, the governor explained that he could not supply precise numbers except to say that of the nearly 40,000 people working for the Panama Canal and the Panama Railroad Company, "between 8,000 and 10,000 of these employees are indisputably white. The remainder constitute for the greater portion a mixture of races. This is the reason for our primary classification of employees on the basis of nationality rather than of race or color."[37]

African Americans posed the most obvious challenge to this classification scheme. In the past, black U.S. citizens had been hired to work in some senior positions, such as managing the silver clubhouses. But Canal Zone officials committed to the Zone's racial hierarchy encountered difficulties in providing African American employees with sepa-

[32] "Estimates of Total Number of Silver Alien Employees and Number of West Indian Employees and Other Alien Employees by Major Organizational Units of the Panama Canal and Panama Railroad," appended to Ellis S. Stone to Governor Mehaffey, September 4, 1944, 2-P-59, box 419, RG 185, NACP.

[33] Major, *Prize Possession*, 212. Archival records also reflect the employment of Hondurans, but I was unable to locate precise numbers for that population.

[34] William Dawson to State, March 1941, 811f.504/385, RG 59, NACP.

[35] Julie Greene examines a similar incompatibility that European workers posed to the gold-silver system in the early twentieth century in "Spaniards on the Silver Roll."

[36] Marco E. Tamayo, "En lamentable situación los obreros colombianos que trabajan actualmente en la Republica de Panamá," *El Siglo*, June 20, 1941.

[37] Edgerton to Lawrence W. Cramer, May 1, 1942, 2-C-55, box 121, RG 185, NACP.

rate gold standard facilities or adequate schools for their children. By the late 1920s, only twenty-three black U.S. citizens worked in the Canal Zone, and most were on the silver roll.[38] When the reification of the color line during World War II relied on racializing nationality, Canal Zone employers stopped hiring black U.S. citizens altogether.[39]

Tensions within silver housing and facilities festered, sometimes erupting in violence. As early as the summer of 1940, police officers had to be stationed during mealtime in a silver mess hall in Gatún, where fights ensued when "Latin" Panamanians insisted they be given their meals before West Indians.[40] Those tensions peaked in the summer of 1941, when riots broke out at labor camps across the Canal Zone. Rioting continued into 1942, with some incidents lasting days, and involving as many as three thousand workers at a time fighting with knives, rocks, bottles, and sticks.[41] The intervention of Canal Zone police only further irked "Latin" workers, who resented being under the authority of the black officers who policed the silver labor force.

U.S. employers elsewhere in Central America had long exploited racial animosity and linguistic divisions as a labor management strategy, but Canal Zone employers during World War II were now tasked with mediating such tensions to prevent them from inhibiting defense construction.[42] To prevent fights between Latin American and West Indian workers, officials began to informally tinker with the Zone's racial hierarchy, further segregating housing facilities and mess halls.[43] When it came to placing Spanish American–born "offsprings of West Indians," Canal Zone officials improvised: "they are placed where they get along best."[44] Silver workers helped police these divides in ways that betrayed the limits of ethnic nationalism for black Spanish-speaking Latin Americans during this period, with many reportedly referring to any mess hall attendant whose skin was "darker than brown" as "Jamaican," even if the person spoke Spanish and had been born in Spanish America.[45]

One West Indian Panamanian reported a sense that as white and mestizo Panamanians became more racist, Canal Zone officials became more likely to "concede social equality" to them.[46] But non-U.S. workers continued to find their path to the gold roll

[38] Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 35.

[39] F. H. Wang, Executive Secretary of the Panama Canal, Memorandum to Governor Joseph Mehaffey, December 30, 1944, 2-C-55, box 121, RG 185, NACP.

[40] Memo for Chief of Police and Fire Division, July 9, 1940, 2-P-59, box 419, RG 185, NACP.

[41] "Dificultades en la Zona del Canal" and "Batalla campal en la Zona del Canal entre obreros," July 26, 1941, Embajada de Panamá en EUA, vol. 88: Julio E Briceño (March–October 1941) and Narciso Garay, MRE Panama.

[42] On race and United Fruit's labor management practices in Guatemala and Costa Rica, see Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2011).

[43] "Riot between W. I. and Latin American Workers in Canal Zone Quelled by Police," *Panama American*, July 28, 1941; memo for Chief of Division regarding Disturbances between West Indians and Latin Americans at Cocoli, November 29, 1941, 2-P-59 (5), box 419, RG 185, NACP; Jerome Barras, Assistant to the Chief Quartermaster, "Transfer of Jamaican Contract Laborers to La Boca," December 10, 1941, 2-P-59 (5), box 419, RG 185, NACP; Vincent Mowatt to T. G. Coleman, Assistant Supervisor M.E. Div., Pedro Miguel Locks, December 6, 1941, 2-P-59 (5), box 419, RG 185, NACP.

[44] Walter Thurston to State, "Recruitment of Salvadoran Labor for the Panama Canal," May 20, 1943, 811f.504/443, RG 59, NACP.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Linda Smart Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representations on the Isthmus of Panama," annex to report entitled "'The Forgotten People': A Report on the Condition of the British West Indians on the Isthmus of Panama," composed by the British Vice Consulate in Colón, Panama, March 1943, CO 318/447/6, The National Archives of the UK [hereafter TNA].

obstructed.[47] A major force behind this obstruction was white U.S. workers in the Canal Zone, who organized primarily through the Metal Trades Council (MTC) of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), an organization with notoriously conservative racial politics. The MTC had worked actively over the years to keep non-white and foreign workers off of the gold roll, and to prevent silver workers from affiliating with the AFL. When the advent of defense construction during World War II promised to create new jobs, the AFL lobbied Congress to attach an amendment to the third locks funding bill that would reserve most gold positions on the project for U.S. citizens.[48] Though the amendment was technically suspended after it was passed, Panamanians made no significant gold roll gains during the war. To the great dismay of many, a white or mestizo Latin American was still a silver Latin American.

Even as workers jockeyed to rearrange the racial hierarchy in Canal Zone labor camps, they began to use the wartime rhetoric of equality to protest discrimination. This language was ubiquitous in Latin America. In an effort to strengthen the inter-American alliance, the U.S. government actively dispersed propaganda across the region, sponsoring radio programming and distributing news features and photographs, pamphlets, magazines, posters, and feature films.[49] Good Neighbor rhetoric applied to wartime objectives espoused the common heritage of "Americans" from across the region as pioneers of republicanism and therefore natural allies in the war for democracy. This language, which worked actively to flatten racial difference in the Americas and advance instead a bond of fraternity, was circulated alongside the familiar tracts of Allied leaders—the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, and the Declaration of the United Nations—that spelled out the moral imperatives of war. Some U.S. efforts specifically sought to combat German and Japanese propaganda in Latin America that criticized the United States' record on racial discrimination in order to drive a wedge into the inter-American alliance. Sending African American "goodwill ambassadors" to Latin America, U.S. officials endeavored to present a more racially inclusive ally.[50]

In the early years of the war, the rising moral currency of anti-racist internationalist messaging did not lead to a drastic realigning of Canal Zone struggles against discrimination. Rather, diverse actors adopted the language to different ends, often in isolation from one another. Silver workers from surrounding Latin American countries protested

[47] Instead of being embedded in the treaty, the equal employment opportunity stipulation was indicated in a "Memo of Understanding" attached to the Hull-Alfaro Treaty of 1936.

[48] The AFL originally lobbied for an amendment to the funding bill that would limit all employment on the project to U.S. citizens only. When the cost of that proposition made it a non-starter, the AFL settled for an amendment stipulating that all skilled and technical positions would be reserved for U.S. citizens. Under pressure from the State Department, the McCarran Amendment was expanded to allow Panamanians and West Indians with more than fifteen years of service to also assume skilled positions, but the number of workers from the latter two groups was negligible. Roosevelt navigated contradictory domestic and international pressures: the bill passed with the amendment, but the amendment was suspended each year.

[49] See *History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs* (Washington D.C., 1947); Darlene J. Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin, Tex., 2012); and Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch, eds., *¡Américas Unidas! Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940–46)* (Madrid, 2012).

[50] For Panama, see Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, chap. 3. For Brazil, see Graham, *Shifting the Meaning of Democracy*, chap. 5.

discrimination by invoking the threat that it posed to hemispheric unity. This was a compelling approach given that the Latin American workforce consisted of citizens from at least five different countries that the United States courted in the project of hemisphere defense. As one Colombian declared, "We are under the tutelage of the country that is the standard-bearer of Democracy at these critical moments in the history of the world, and yet Latin American workers in the Panama Canal Zone have no guarantees for the crime of not having been born with blue eyes in the land of Uncle Sam." Noting the contradiction between inter-American segregation and the project of Pan-American unity, the author asked, "Will this not be the antidote to what they preach all over the American Continent?"[51]

Upper- and middle-class Panamanians also seized on wartime anti-racist tropes to elevate their own longstanding grievances about nationality-based discrimination in a more morally resonant rhetoric. In September 1943, Victor Urrutia, the president of an organization called the Society of Panamanians in the Service of the Government of the United States, authored a memo on behalf of eighteen Panamanian labor, youth, community, and political organizations. As the title, "Inter-American Relations in the Canal Zone," suggests, the memo framed Canal Zone labor issues in foreign policy terms.[52] The memo was to be delivered to the U.S. government by Mexican labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the president of the Confederation of Latin American Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina [CTAL]), which was founded in 1938 in the spirit of Mexican revolutionary internationalism.[53] Over the course of seventeen pages, Urrutia employed the familiar motif of the Good Neighbor policy in making his case against labor practices in the Canal Zone, but he articulated it now in explicitly anti-racist terms: "there should be a practical application of the principles of racial equality and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality, which constitute the most noble features of democracies and which furnish them with the moral force that the Axis lacks."[54]

The memo focused on two issues dear to U.S. policymakers: U.S. national security and the credibility of U.S. moral leadership in international affairs. In a letter addressed to Roosevelt introducing the memo, the author declared, "Your Excellency will not fail to understand that the present situation is harmful to your great country's democratic prestige."[55] The memo argued that U.S. policy in the Canal Zone should be used as an opportunity to convince Latin Americans of the righteousness of the Allied cause, noting that Latin American workers would "support the Allies with more or less fervor according to the degree to which they see clearly the difference between totalitarianism and democracy." It went on to quote Roosevelt's own Executive Order 8802, issued in June 1941, which banned discrimination against workers in defense industries on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin. Though the failed application of Executive Order 8802 in the Canal Zone was hardly shocking given the persistence of Jim

[51] "Agria pugna racial en el Canal existe entre los trabajadores de distintos países," August 29, 1941, enclosure to the Panama Canal Periodical Reference Form, 2-P-59 (6), box 419, RG 185, NACP.

[52] Victor Urrutia, "Relaciones interamericanas en la Zona del Canal," 811f.504, RG 59, NACP.

[53] On CTAL, see Patricio Herrera, "El asedio a la clase obrera organizada en los inicios de la Guerra Fría: El caso de la CTAL, 1943–1953," *Revista Divergencia* 5, no. 6 (2016): 29–39; Daniela Spenser, *En combate: La vida de Lombardo Toledano* (Mexico City, 2018).

[54] Urrutia, "Relaciones interamericanas en la Zona del Canal."

[55] Victor Urrutia et al. to Franklin Roosevelt, October 3, 1943, 811f.504, RG 59, NACP.

Crow in the U.S. South, the memo proclaimed, "If subject to criticism and blame in the United States itself, the color line becomes doubly condemnable and stupid when put into practice in the name of the United States Government in the heart of Latin America."[56]

In denouncing racism in all its forms, the memo appeared to represent the plight of all non-U.S. citizen workers in the Zone, but when it turned toward particular demands, the substance was geared toward the concerns of skilled middle-class workers, who believed that their rightful place was alongside U.S. technicians. Urrutia was an assistant engineer hired by the U.S. Army and trained in the United States. In this sense, he was a prototypical upper-middle-class Panamanian. According to personnel reports, his organization accepted only members who stood some chance of joining the limited number of Panamanians already on the gold roll, who tended to be "lighter-colored members of the better families in Panama."[57] No explicitly West Indian organizations were among the signatories of the memo, though several of those who signed, including Urrutia, were affiliated with the opposition political party, the Partido Liberal Renovador, which had begun to court West Indian political support. The governor of the Canal Zone speculated that Urrutia was motivated by such political ambitions. Whether or not Urrutia was a "true believer" in the principles he preached is difficult to discern, but what is indisputable is that he recognized the currency of an international anti-racist message during World War II.

Urrutia's messaging was effective in gaining the attention of State Department officials. But for such a potentially explosive foreign policy issue, the State Department had remarkably little jurisdiction to intervene. The Canal Zone was a U.S. outpost uniquely situated beyond the reach of the U.S. diplomatic corps, falling instead under the purview of the War Department. Some State Department and White House officials saw the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) as one potential avenue for penetrating the conservative walls of Canal Zone governance, and indeed the FEPC had sent an inquiry to the governor of the Canal Zone after receiving complaints about segregation from the NAACP in 1942, but the governor had largely stonewalled.[58] When the question of FEPC jurisdiction over Canal Zone labor was revived in response to Urrutia's memo the following year, officials in the White House and the State Department were reluctant to push the matter, noting that the FEPC committee functioned through public hearings, and publicizing the very issues that most antagonized U.S.-Latin American relations hardly seemed desirable. Instead, a small commission was appointed to quietly investigate.[59]

[56] Urrutia, "Relaciones interamericanas en la Zona del Canal."

[57] Memorandum, April 6, 1944, enclosure to John J. Muccio, Chargé d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy in Panama City, to Secretary of State, April 28, 1944, 811f.504/456, RG 59, NACP.

[58] Edgerton to Cramer.

[59] Memorandum, R. G. McGregor Jr. to Mr. Cabot and [ARA] Mr. Duggan, "Labor Practices in the Canal Zone," May 4, 1944, 811f.504/5-444, RG 59, NACP. Jonathan Daniels authored a letter to the governor in Roosevelt's name that insisted, "It is my desire that there be nothing in our employment or other policies in the Canal Zone which might serve as justifiable basis for any charge that the United States of America deals with its neighbors of any race or nation in anything less than the fairest and most neighborly spirit," but Roosevelt was reportedly reluctant to be vocal on the topic during an election year. Letter drafted by Jonathan Daniels for FDR to send to Brig. Gen. J. C. Mehaffey, Acting Governor of the Panama Canal Zone, May 13, 1944, enclosure to State Department memorandum by R. G. McGregor Jr., May 15, 1944, 811f.504/458, RG 59, NACP. Department of State, Division of the American Republics, memo for the files: Labor, 811f.504/12-944, RG 59, NACP. The Fair Employment Practices Commission

West Indian contract workers in the Zone, as subjects rather than citizens, were in quite a different position than their Latin American peers. The alliance between Britain and the United States was hardly vulnerable to the weight of their grievances, and British representatives in Panama were generally of little assistance in advancing their interests. The British ambassador to Panama opined that Anglo-American relations "should only be put to the strain . . . for matters of higher importance" than West Indian labor objections. He impressed upon a vice-consul sympathetic to the silver cause that "the British West Indians here are a continual potential menace to the smoothness of our diplomatic waters, and we must do our utmost to prevent it from invading them."[60] The Jamaican government sent a labor representative to the British consulate in Panama to address the labor unrest of the early war years, but rather than advocate on behalf of workers, his mission was to mitigate the disruption that such grievances caused.[61] Nonetheless, West Indian contract workers, too, framed their plight in the language of the global moment in appeals to U.S. and British authorities. A common strategic trope in correspondence with the British government was to perform loyalty, as when members of the Dunbar Cultural League asked the British legation, "Does it not occur to you that Britain's future position in world affairs may require the bolstering influence of her loyal blacks? . . . She will have use for us, the loyal and the true."[62]

The Panamanian government also took up anti-racist internationalist messaging, but it did so in pursuit of yet another set of objectives: to further advance the longstanding project of curtailing U.S. power on the isthmus and to rally popular support at home. Arnulfo Arias was ousted in a coup in 1941, and his replacement, Ricardo de la Guardia, was a U.S.-friendly liberal who, soon after assuming office, concluded a strategic military agreement with the United States that granted the U.S. 134 additional defense sites in the republic outside of the Canal Zone. The expanded presence of U.S. military personnel throughout the country further soured Panamanians long frustrated with U.S. occupation, and de la Guardia was eager to shake his reputation as a U.S. lackey even as he maintained the alliance. Though as a politician de la Guardia was less publicly committed to the xenophobic nationalism of the Arias administration, he was himself known to be a devout racist, and the racial hierarchy of Panamanian society comfort-

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was also prevented from looking deeply into discrimination against people of Mexican descent in the United States during the war for the same reason. See Justin Hart, "Making Democracy Safe for the World: Race, Propaganda, and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy during World War II," *Pacific Historical Review* 73 no. 1 (2004): 49–84. The administration also showed reluctance to commit to enforcing Executive Order 8802 in the Canal Zone out of concern for the precedent it might set for other overseas military sites where "mixed personnel" were employed. R. G. McGregor Jr., Division of Caribbean and Central American Affairs, "Labor Problems in the Canal Zone," March 9, 1944, 811f.504/454, RG 59, NACP.

[60] Charles Dodd to J. A. Thwaites, May 12, 1942, CO 318/447/6, TNA. The British and U.S. governments acted to mitigate the complaints—the British created a new labor representative position in the British consulate in Panama dedicated to mediating conflicts between workers and Canal Zone employers, and at the United States' request, Britain launched a propaganda campaign designed to convince black British subjects in the Canal Zone of the importance of the war effort. C. Greaves Hill, January 26, 1944, "Report for the year January 27th 1943 to January 26th 1944," FO 986/72, TNA. "British Propaganda in Panama Canal Zone," January 8, 1943, FO 371/34185, TNA.

[61] W. K. Smith to Foreign Office, May 9, 1944, FO 986/72, TNA. Notably, when he returned to Jamaica at the conclusion of his term, Canal Zone authorities thanked him for his service.

[62] Dunbar Cultural League to British Vice Consul in Colón, February 20, 1943, annex to "The Forgotten People," CO 318/447/6, TNA.

ably supported his broader cohort of elites. He was certainly no champion of West Indian rights, which continued to be compromised by the 1941 Constitution.[63]

And yet, for de la Guardia's government, discrimination against all silver workers in the Canal Zone was a productively symbolic issue with which to advance the broader anti-imperialist cause. Repudiation of Canal Zone discrimination powerfully represented a broader rejection of all manner of U.S. condescensions. In pleading its case before the ILO, the Panamanian government gave Zone workers' grievances a global platform. The government delegate circulated a petition signed by some five thousand workers stating that Canal Zone labor policy "runs in frank contradiction to the fraternity and racial equality that President Roosevelt extols in the name of the Good Neighbor policy and that have been incorporated in a general sense into the Atlantic Charter and the pact of the United Nations."[64]

U.S. officials viewed the Panamanian government's anti-racist position with suspicion, just as they had Urrutia's. One U.S. embassy official charged, "the ruling element of Panama, a small white group, was hopelessly outnumbered by the negroes and mestizos" and would not wish for policies that might threaten their supremacy.[65] Indeed, entreaties by the Panamanian government to the U.S. on the subject of Canal Zone labor had made no mention of segregation except to protest Panamanian exclusion from the gold roll. In this context, many U.S. officials suggested that Washington should focus on alleviating the frustration of skilled Panamanians. As one noted dismissively, "It is as these [skilled white Panamanians] become bitter and join in the chorus of protest now being sung by more or less professional agitators, who are relatively less powerful and less influential, that such a danger will become particularly acute."[66] Accordingly, the most substantive concessions negotiated in wartime met the concerns of skilled Panamanian workers.[67] U.S. officials framed their actions around the 1936 treaty, which

[63] On World War II basing in Panama, see Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts* (Washington, D.C., 1964); Major, *Prize Possession*, 261–270; and Orlando J. Pérez, "Panama: Nationalism and the Challenge to Canal Security," in Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel, eds., *Latin America during World War II* (Lanham, Md., 2007), 54–74. On liberalism, race, and nationalism in Panama, see Peter A. Szok, *La última gaviota: Liberalism and Nostalgia in Early Twentieth-Century Panamá* (Westport, Conn., 2001). On Ricardo de la Guardia's racism, see Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 100–101.

[64] "Más de cinco mil obreros de la Zona envían exposición a la Conf. Internl. del Trabajo," *Estrella de Panama*, April 1, 1944.

[65] Secret memorandum of conversation, Subject: Racial Discrimination in the Panama Canal Zone between John Muccio, Howard Wilson, and Bonnie Farber, September 25, 1944, 811f.504/9-2544, RG 59, NACP.

[66] John J. Muccio, Chargé d'Affaires, to Secretary of State, Strictly Confidential, Subject: Transmitting Governor's Report Together with Embassy's Comments on Panamanian Labor Memorandum Concerning Canal Zone Employment Policies, April 28, 1944, 811f.504/456, RG 59, NACP.

[67] Two boards were established in the Zone in September 1944 to consider and investigate claims of discrimination made by Panamanian employees who stated that they were doing the same work as U.S. employees but receiving different wages or benefits. These boards were not concerned with complaints registered by citizens of countries other than Panama. A. M. Warren to Secretary of State, Subject: Labor Policies of United States Agencies in the Canal Zone, September 19, 1944, 811f.504/9-1944, RG 59, NACP. The army issued new regulations that granted vacation time to employees on an equal basis regardless of nationality, but only for those on the gold roll. Silver roll employees did see some improvement in their circumstances as well. Through conferences between the Panamanian foreign minister and the commanding general of the Zone, it was agreed that silver workers would receive vacation benefits after thirty days of sick leave had been accumulated, and overtime pay would be given for work in excess of eight hours rather than ten. Memorandum of Conversation between Samuel Lewis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama, Enrique Jimenez, Ambassador of Panama, Mario de Diego, Director of Protocol of

forbade discrimination against Panamanians, rather than Executive Order 8802, which forbade discrimination based on race. In doing so, they reinforced the fissures that existed among non-U.S. workers, but not enough to prevent the shared rhetoric of anti-racism from paving the way for new strategic alliances.

West Indians who had been in Panama for decades by this time and their Panamanian-born children, now coming of age, witnessed the wartime change in rhetorical strategies that Latin American workers and labor leaders, middle-class Panamanians, and Panamanian politicians—all of whom had previously been antagonistic or indifferent to their cause—now employed in pursuit of their own interests. This opening created an opportunity for West Indian Panamanians to form new alliances in combating both of the racial hierarchies that subjugated them: Jim Crow in the Canal Zone and mestizo nationalism in the republic.

Many West Indian Panamanians were active adherents of black internationalism in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and accordingly had long been convinced that racism was a transnational phenomenon requiring a transnational solution. They had openly decried those Latin Panamanians who embraced scientific racism to assert their superiority, when the same logic denigrated Latin Panamanians in the eyes of U.S. Americans. The internationalist anti-racist sensibility on the rise during World War II appeared to create a space in which to redefine the contours of Panamanian nationalism away from the exclusionary terms of *panameñismo*.

George Westerman, a prominent West Indian Panamanian journalist, emerged as a leader in the effort to forge a more inclusive Panamanian nationalism. Born in Colón in 1910 to West Indian parents, Westerman was of the *criollo* generation of Panamanian-born West Indians, who grew during this time to outnumber their island-born parents. He and like-minded leaders encouraged their constituents to embrace Panamanian national identity as an effective means of improving their lot. If *panameñismo* relied on cultural arguments for exclusion, assimilation would render such arguments null.[68] Together with West Indian Panamanian lawyer Pedro Rhodes, Westerman founded the National Civic League in 1944, which mobilized West Indian Panamanians and "Latin" Panamanians together to fight discriminatory legislation and identify and bolster supportive politicians.[69]

A key element of Westerman's strategy was to rally West Indian Panamanian support for Panamanian anti-imperialist objectives. Doing so would dispute a harmful stereotype of West Indians as inherently anti-patriotic supporters of U.S. power. More to the point, as partisans of greater Panamanian control over the Canal increasingly framed

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Panama, Narciso E. Garay, First Secretary of the Embassy of Panama, and Otis Mulliken, Chief of International Labor, Social and Health Affairs, December 12, 1944, 811f.504/12-1244, RG 59, NACP.

[68] On the complex evolution of West Indian Panamanian identities during this period, see Corinealdi, "Redefining Home." For two different perspectives on Westerman's legacy, see Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*; and George Priestley, "Race and Nationalism in Panama: George Westerman and the Antillean Question, 1941–1960," *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean and Its Diaspora* 7, no. 1 (2004): 1–58. Besides creating civic and advocacy organizations within Panama and the Canal Zone, Westerman fostered ties with African American leaders and artists. On his efforts to foster an appreciation of black excellence in both Panama and the Zone by sponsoring cultural exchange, see Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, chap. 3.

[69] "Organize Now for the Campaign of Full Citizenship Rights, the Sacred Heritage of all Peoples in a Democracy," political ad, *Panama Tribune*, July 30, 1944; "1000 Signatures to Petition to Lift 'Citizenship' Ban," *Panama Tribune*, July 23, 1944.

their anti-imperialist endeavor in anti-racist terms, West Indians could merge their own anti-racist objectives with that broader agenda. The proposition was simple: if Panamanian politicians would make practical application in domestic politics of the anti-racist language they now embraced in the international sphere, they could count on West Indian Panamanian support.[70]

In this way, Westerman and his allies successfully asserted West Indian Panamanians as a visible and growing political bloc with nationalist sensibilities. The opposition Renovador Party seized on the momentum and courted West Indian support, seeking interviews and taking out ads in the West Indian Panamanian newspaper, the *Panama Tribune*.[71] In 1944, the Renovador Party's presidential candidate campaigned against anti-black legislation, forcing the ruling party to also shift toward inclusion, however begrudgingly. In December 1944, de la Guardia's administration suspended the discriminatory 1941 Constitution, ushering in several years of optimism regarding the new coalitions that the surge of anti-racist rhetoric wrought.

THE IMMEDIATE POSTWAR PERIOD presented a brief opening in which anti-racist internationalism appeared ascendant. The reinvigoration of international multilateral forums and the beginnings of a wave of decolonization that would bring newly independent nations led by people of color into their halls changed the environment significantly. Long disadvantaged in international politics by racialized perceptions of fitness for self-rule, Latin American jurists, diplomats, and scholars worked to create a postwar world order that privileged anti-racism. Latin American representatives advocated for a more capacious notion of "human rights" in the UN Charter that would include a greater focus on racial equality, and were active in shaping the UN Declaration on Human Rights.[72] Denouncing racism became, in the postwar years, as powerful a display of modernity as performing racism had been just a few years prior.

The broader political context in much of Latin America was propitious for anti-racism to gain further traction. For a brief period, the region witnessed a "democratic spring" as the wartime struggle against totalitarianism was brought to bear on Latin American politics. Dictators fell, labor rose up, and ideologically diverse leftist coalitions gained strength across the region. The Allied victory gave communist parties a boost in prestige, and membership soared to new levels. The resurgence of the political

[70] Political scientist George Priestley describes the relationship more bluntly as clientelistic in "Ethnicity, Class and the National Question in Panama," 220, 229.

[71] For instance, "Vote for Pedro Rhodes," *Panama Tribune*, April 22, 1944; "Help Him to Serve You," *Panama Tribune*, April 29, 1944; "Racial Bias in Panama Opposed by Renovador," *Panama Tribune*, October 1, 1944; "Don Domingo Diaz Favors Citizenship for All Born in Republic," *Panama Tribune*, October 29, 1944.

[72] See Pernet, "Shifting Position to the Global South." To the great frustration of many in the region, Latin American nations were excluded from the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, where the blueprint of what would become the United Nations was formulated, but they arrived at the San Francisco Conference armed with a number of plans to strengthen the relative power of smaller countries in the new global order, such as fighting to strengthen the power of the General Assembly in relation to the Security Council. See also Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2016). On Latin Americans' efforts to shape the meaning of human rights at this juncture, see Katherine M. Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2019); and Mark Philip Bradley, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2016).

Left further buttressed the rise of anti-racist internationalism. Communist labor organizers in Latin America had been proponents of anti-racism in the interwar years but had fallen short in making that platform mainstream; more commonly, labor and the state had formed corporatist relationships, bound together by (sometimes racist and anti-foreign) articulations of mestizo nationalism.

In 1945, silver workers in the Canal Zone organized in a single union across racial and national lines for the first time. "Latin" workers and West Indian Panamanians joined together and applied for a Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) charter, ultimately establishing Local 713 of the United Public Workers of America (UPWA). The CIO had, since its founding, embraced a racially egalitarian rhetoric that made it far better suited to silver organizing than the AFL, which had repeatedly refused to accept silver workers into its fold in years prior. In 1939, CIO representatives attempted to organize silver workers in the Canal Zone, but Zone officials restricted their efforts. After the war, silver workers eager to affiliate with the CIO obtained the reluctant blessing of the Zone administration, in part because it deemed a CIO charter preferable to affiliation with the openly anti-imperialist CTAL. Once the charter was approved, the CIO dispatched representatives from the U.S. to the canal to help organize.

The leadership of Local 713 consisted of prominent West Indian Panamanians, like Ed Gaskin of the Teachers' Union, as well as "Latin" Panamanians, though they were fewer in number, which reflects the majority black labor force on the silver roll in the postwar years. Local 713 launched a bilingual newspaper, cleverly titled *Ac-CIÓ-n*, and announced the union's mission in the first edition in no uncertain terms: "We are united for the expressed purpose of replacing the Hitlerian condition that now exists in the Canal Zone."[73] Noting failed attempts to organize in a single union in the past, the paper urged, "We are, all of us, Panamanians, West Indians, Salvadorians, etc., suffering the same bad conditions and injustices on the same jobs . . . hence the necessity for organizing all workers regardless of race, color, creed or national origin for the common good."[74]

It was evident from the beginning that Local 713 would break with custom and engage in politics beyond the boundaries of the Canal Zone to augment its power. The first evidence of this was in early ties between Local 713 and the increasingly active Panamanian labor movement in the republic. In May 1946, Canal Zone workers took part in Panama's annual Labor Day celebration for the first time.[75] Silver workers also continued to build a strategic alliance with Panamanian politicians. The promulgation of a new constitution in 1946 restored citizenship to Panamanian-born West Indians, cementing the strength of the *criollo* community as a political bloc. The extent to which the silver plight lent itself strategically to the Panamanian government's international agenda continued to make partnership with silver workers attractive. The first edition of *Ac-CIÓ-n* included a letter from the president of Panama declaring his government's "decided and enthusiastic support" for the CIO's "just mission to eradicate racial discrimination, which has no possible justification in a true Democracy."[76]

[73] Editorial, *Ac-CIÓ-n*, July 4, 1946, Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá, Panama City.

[74] "10,000 Workers Plunge into the Battle: Union Received with Open Hands by Zone Employees," *Ac-CIÓ-n*, July 4, 1946.

[75] "Workers in May Day Parade Display Banners Rapping Labor Conditions," *Panama Tribune*, May 5, 1946.

[76] Note from President Jiménez, July 2, 1946, printed in *Ac-CIÓ-n*, July 4, 1946.

Meanwhile, anti-U.S. sentiment continued to permeate Panamanian nationalism. When the United States and Panama reached an agreement in December 1947 to extend the United States' lease of some wartime defense sites, mass riots erupted in the streets, forcing the National Assembly to ultimately reject the treaty unanimously. As silver workers lent their support to popular anti-imperialist objectives, it became increasingly common for Panamanians to present racism as an ill that the United States had imposed on the isthmus, further melding anti-racist and anti-imperialist causes, and proclaiming discrimination antithetical to "true" Panamanian values.

The global stage remained a preferred venue for the Panamanian government to press the dual issues of anti-racism and anti-imperialism epitomized by the plight of silver labor. At the ILO meeting in Paris in 1945, the Panamanian delegation asked whether there could be world peace without justice in the Canal Zone.[77] At the regional conference of the ILO in Mexico City the following year, the Panamanian delegation proposed the creation of an investigative committee to look into Canal Zone labor practices, placing the integrity of the organization on the line: "Are we going to oblige the workers of the world to lose their faith in the conferences of the ILO?"[78] In these settings, delegations regularly presented U.S. actions in the Canal Zone as a test of the legitimacy of U.S. global leadership and emphasized the ramifications that U.S. policy on the isthmus would have beyond Panama, which one delegate called "the mirror of the Latin American countries."[79]

West Indian Panamanians also courted the support of the global community directly. In 1948, a National Civic League pamphlet on silver conditions remarked, "the struggle for equality of opportunity and a decent standard of living is universal . . . Mechanical progress has knitted the world so closely together that the adage, 'we are our brother's keepers,' has come to have a literal meaning."[80] Leaders from Local 713 touring the United States linked silver discrimination in the Canal Zone with "the plight of colonial people throughout the world."[81] The mood was optimistic, with the *Panama Tribune* insisting that discussions of the gold-silver system at the ILO and the UN were "infallible indications that the world is developing an attitude bordering on contempt" for Canal Zone discrimination.[82]

The postwar anti-racist moment, within Panama and beyond, was built on ideological diversity. Demetrio Porras, a Panamanian politician who denounced Canal Zone discrimination at the UN General Assembly meeting in 1946, was a founder of the Panamanian Socialist Party and had struggled against xenophobic policies as a member of the Panamanian National Assembly in the 1930s. Porras was one of several Renovador

[77] *International Labour Conference, Twenty-Seventh Session, Paris, 1945: Record of Proceedings* (Montreal, 1945), 130.

[78] *Tercera conferencia del trabajo de los Estados de América miembros de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo, Mexico, April 1946: Actas de las sesiones* (Montreal, 1946), 198.

[79] *International Labour Conference, Thirty-Second Session, Geneva, 1949: Record of Proceedings* (Montreal, 1949), 99.

[80] George W. Westerman, *A Study of Socio-Economic Conflicts on the Panama Canal Zone* (Panama City, 1948).

[81] "'Silver' Workers Gain Ear of American Public," *Ac-CIÓ-n*, June 15, 1948, Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá.

[82] "The Appropriate Time," *Panama Tribune*, April, 21, 1944. The paper could not help but issue something of an "I told you so," noting that if the administration had only listened to the "eloquent arguments" made by the Panama Canal West Indian Employment Association and the *Panama Tribune* over the previous twenty years, "it would not be today reaping the whirlwind of such acrid international disapprobation."

Party leaders who had participated in Popular Front initiatives in Panama in the interwar years. CTAL, led by pro-Soviet labor leader Lombardo Toledano, continued to draw attention to Canal Zone discrimination in international forums. The Communist Party's influence in the UPWA-CIO in the years following World War II further illustrates the dynamic leftist alliances undergirding anti-racist struggles during this period in the U.S. and Latin America alike. In this light, it is no surprise that the global politics of the Cold War would have a different impact on anti-racist struggles than the politics of World War II had.

The advent of the Cold War once more changed both the place of race in international relations and the dynamic between international and domestic struggles against hierarchy. There were some continuities. The Cold War, like World War II, provided leverage for leaders of "non-white" countries to press the United States for fairer treatment in international politics. Now, rather than point to the war against Hitlerism, they could exploit U.S. sensitivities to communist critiques of the United States' record on race.[83] But the ability of individuals participating in domestic anti-racist struggles to take advantage of the Cold War to advance their own agendas was significantly constrained by a different facet of Cold War geopolitics: containment. Anti-racist struggles during World War II had run little risk of coming under assault as fascist-inspired, but with the United States' focus on anti-communism in the Cold War, the very same movements were now examined under a different microscope. The Cold War politics of race empowered some anti-racists and disempowered others, even when their struggles at home had no more to do with the Soviet Union than they had with Hitler's Germany.

In Latin America, a wave of anti-communist repression began to sweep the region in the late 1940s, dealing a blow to the democratic spring, which was finally snuffed out entirely in 1954 with the CIA-orchestrated coup against Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz. The United States was especially committed to keeping communists away from the canal, which meant generously supporting anti-communists in the Panamanian republic.[84] In this context, U.S. officials embraced the emerging arbiter of Pana-

[83] The "Cold War civil rights" scholarship in U.S. historiography has illustrated how the U.S. government's contest with the Soviet Union to claim moral victory on the issue of race empowered African American campaigns against discrimination in some ways, and disempowered them in others. The view from the Canal Zone suggests that the Cold War civil rights story is but one national iteration of a phenomenon unfurling around the globe, in which similar dynamics shaped international relations between more and less powerful countries, as well as the politics of race in myriad domestic contexts. On the relationship between black freedom struggles in the United States and U.S. relations with the world during and after World War II, see Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York, 2003); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J., 2003); Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895–1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000); Thomas A. Guglielmo, "A Martial Freedom Movement: Black G.I.s' Political Struggles during World War II," *Journal of American History* 104, no. 4 (2018): 879–903; Adriane Lentz-Smith, "Passports to Adventure: African Americans and the US Security Project," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2016): 537–543; Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2012); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2015); and Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997).

[84] See Celestino Andrés Araúz, *Panamá y sus relaciones internacionales*, vol. 1 (Panama City, 1994); and Conniff, *Panama and the United States*.

manian politics, the anti-communist head of the National Police, José Remón. Remón played a leading role in ushering Panamanian presidents into and out of office in the turbulent years following the war, which saw six different presidencies between 1948 and 1952, when Remón finally shed his uniform and assumed the presidency himself.[85]

The impact of containment on Cold War–era anti-racist struggles in Panama was varied and somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, anti-communism splintered the anti-racist labor coalition forged in wartime, just as it ripped labor movements in two throughout the hemisphere. In 1946, the FBI declared the UPWA a communist front, and in the years that followed, Zone officials worked to rid the Zone of UPWA-CIO representatives Max Brodsky and Joseph Sachs. Sachs was ultimately imprisoned in the Canal Zone for libel.[86] The Panamanian government deported Brodsky, and the U.S. State Department refused to grant passports to new UPWA representatives assigned to Panama thereafter.[87] As part of a broader regional Cold War campaign, the U.S. government financially supported AFL efforts to counter the influence of the CIO and CTAL in Latin America.[88] The AFL attempted to win favor with silver workers by taking up the mantle of racial discrimination in 1949, but the labor federation could not escape its long legacy of race-based exclusion in the Zone. To the suggestion that the AFL might establish a silver labor union, members of Local 713 replied, "our first reaction is to laugh loud, long, and contemptuously."[89]

On the other hand, the anti-communist split empowered moderate members of Local 713's black leadership. While radical workers decried U.S. efforts to divide a successful experiment in cross-race organizing, some prominent West Indian Panamanian leaders, including Ed Gaskin and George Westerman, were themselves concerned about communist influence in the union and considered Brodsky and Sachs to be excessively radical. Their concerns did not reflect mere ideological bias; rather, they recognized that communist influence might delegitimize silver workers' case before U.S. and Panamanian authorities. In 1948, Gaskin and other key *criollo* leaders broke away from Local 713 to protest the direction that the union was taking.[90] When the CIO purged the UPWA along with other "communist-dominated" unions in 1950, Local 713 became defunct, and the breakaway group of silver dissidents became the leadership of a new union, Local 900 of the Government and Civic Employees Organizing Committee. In effect, the decision to break from Local 713 strengthened those leaders' relationship with the anti-communist Panamanian political and military establishments and en-

[85] On Remón's rise and tenure, see Thomas L. Pearcy, *We Answer Only to God: Politics and the Military in Panama, 1903–1947* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1998); and Larry LaRae Pippin, *The Remón Era: An Analysis of a Decade of Events in Panama, 1947–1957* (Stanford, Calif., 1964).

[86] *Sachs v. Government of the Canal Zone*, U.S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, 176 F.2d 292, decided October 24, 1949.

[87] Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 114.

[88] For recent work on Cold War labor diplomacy and organizing in the Americas, see Larissa Rosa Corrêa, *Disseram que voltei americanizado: Relações sindicais Brasil–Estados Unidos na ditadura militar* (Campinas, 2017); Herrera, "El asedio a la clase obrera organizada"; and Ernesto Semán, *Ambassadors of the Working Class: Argentina's International Labor Activists and Cold War Democracy in the Americas* (Durham, N.C., 2017).

[89] "So the A.F.L. Wants to Organize Us," *Ac-CIÓ-n*, February 10, 1949, Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá.

[90] See George W. Westerman, *Blocking Them at the Canal: Failure of the Red Attempt to Control Local Workers in the Vital Panama Canal Area* (Panama City, 1952); and "Zero Hour Has Struck to Rid the Local 713-CIO of Pro-Red Leaders," *Panama Tribune*, February 22, 1948.

hanced their ability to take the United States to task on issues of discrimination without being accused of communist motivations.

Desires to contain the spread of communism also motivated White House and State Department officials to try to lessen discrimination in the Canal Zone in order to prevent it from nurturing communist sympathies among workers. As one official remarked of existing disparities within the Zone, "we couldn't do more to encourage Communism if we offered Communist Party cards to all Canal Zone employees."[91] White House and State Department officials were particularly sensitive to Panamanians' strategy of pressing these issues at the ILO and the UN. After taking a beating on the topic at previous ILO meetings, Washington sent a labor relations advisor to investigate race and labor in the Zone and produce a report in time for the 1947 meeting in Geneva. The report ultimately called for a number of drastic changes to Canal Zone labor policies, which in fact mirrored Local 713's proposals. Zone officials, however, preferred to improve silver benefits and salaries in smaller ways to take the momentum out of labor organizing, and repeatedly rejected more substantive changes, such as the creation of a single pay scale.[92]

The possibility that the strategic alliance between West Indian Panamanians, "Latin" Panamanian workers, and Panamanian politicians might succeed in achieving their respective objectives reached its greatest potential with the presidency of José Remón. As the head of the Panamanian National Guard, Remón had turned the army into one of the most racially diverse institutions in the country, which earned him credibility as an ally among West Indian Panamanians. Westerman campaigned for Remón and helped to register hundreds of West Indian Panamanian voters on the eve of his election. Gaskin, now the leader of Local 900, also rallied workers to support Remón's presidential bid in 1952. A number of gestures reinforced Remón's high standing among West Indian Panamanians, including his public condemnations of racial discrimination and his decision to award Westerman Panama's highest honor, the Order of Vasco Núñez de Balboa.[93]

Secure in his position as an important anti-communist ally of the U.S., Remón surprised officials in Washington by demanding a new canal treaty with the United States soon after assuming office. In making his case, he noted that injustices in the Canal Zone played into the hands of communist propagandists. In 1953, the two governments began negotiating the treaty that would formally end the gold-silver system.

Silver workers and their representatives made their voices heard in this process. Gaskin wrote a position paper on the topic of labor policy and organized a massive rally of silver workers to hear Remón speak about his efforts in ongoing negotiations.[94] The quid pro quo was on full display: Remón relied on silver workers to make his case to the United States in ways that attracted the support of the global community, and silver workers, plenty capable of pressing their claims in the court of world opinion, relied on Remón to represent their interests in the halls of the White House. Bidding farewell to

[91] J. Parnell Thomas, as told to Stacy V. Jones, "Reds in the Panama Canal Zone," *Liberty* 25 (May 1, 1948): 14–15, 47, 54, here 54.

[92] "Gov. Turns Down Major Points of Union Demand," *Panama Tribune*, December 17, 1950.

[93] "A President Speaks Out against Race Bias," *Panama Tribune*, August 9, 1953; "Airways Lift Ban on US Negro Tourists as Remón Terms Bias Harmful to R.P.," *Panama Tribune*, August 9, 1953; "High Honor for George Westerman," *Panama Tribune*, August 9, 1953; "Remón Reaffirms Abhorrence of Race Prejudice," *Panama Tribune*, October 25, 1953.

[94] "Remón Accepts Local 900's Offer of Support in Revision of Treaty," *Panama Tribune*, June 14, 1953.

the negotiating delegation as it departed for Washington, one West Indian Panamanian journalist wrote, "Panama, weak in arms, is strong in moral force. It is this force she will use as bargaining power around the conference table."[95]

The 1955 Remón-Eisenhower Treaty marked the culmination of the alliance that had begun in World War II, but it was also the source of its unraveling. On the surface, the treaty seemed to tackle the major symbolic struggle uniting silver workers and Panamanian diplomats: the fight against the dual-wage system.[96] But the results of the treaty's anti-racist accomplishments were underwhelming. The long path toward a uniform wage scale was the slow, minimally consequential dismantling of symbols: first, signage was removed from gold and silver facilities; later, the "gold" and "silver" terminology was replaced with "U.S. rate" and "local rate"; and finally, when a uniform wage scale was created in 1958, the two scales were more or less stacked one on top of the other. Unofficially, U.S. citizens continued to be privileged for better jobs. The system was less overtly discriminatory and certainly less easy for Soviets to exploit, but it was by no means egalitarian.[97]

Also problematic was the extent to which West Indian Panamanian silver workers were hurt by the treaty's principal anti-imperialist accomplishments. Attending to a longstanding frustration of the Panamanian state, the treaty eliminated commissary privileges for non-U.S. workers. This was a major boon to the Panamanian business class, as it would force non-U.S. workers in the Canal Zone to shop in Panamanian commercial establishments instead, but it came at the expense of silver workers, who could no longer take advantage of subsidized Canal Zone stores. The treaty also granted the Panamanian government the right to tax the earnings of Panamanian Zone workers, increasing government revenue while decreasing silver workers' paychecks. On both counts, silver workers paid for the state's economic triumphs.

The economic hardship that the treaty caused exacerbated suffering in the silver community that had been brought about by other recent changes in the Zone. In 1951, the U.S. government reorganized canal administration, and Zone officials implemented a number of cost-saving measures in an effort to make the canal economically self-sufficient. Not incidentally, many of these measures allowed Zone officials to sidestep calls for desegregation. Silver workers were evicted from Canal Zone housing, often relocating to already overcrowded urban spaces in the republic.[98] Racist press coverage in Panama spoke of the "burden" of silver relocation that Panama was shouldering, using racially charged language reminiscent of earlier days, exposing the real limitations of the progress made since the 1940s.[99]

[95] Jack Jamieson, "Drops and Turnovers: Panama, Weak in Arms, Will Use Moral Force to Get New Deal from U.S.," *Panama Tribune*, August 30, 1953.

[96] An ancillary note to the Remón-Eisenhower Treaty of 1955 called for legislation that would end the system, and that was realized in the subsequent 1958 Public Law 85-550. Remón was killed in early 1955, and the treaty was completed and ratified by his vice-president, Ricardo Arias, who succeeded him in office.

[97] Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 119; Major, *Prize Possession*, 227–228.

[98] For more on Canal Zone depopulation, see Kaysha Corinealdi, "Envisioning Multiple Citizenships: West Indian Panamanians and Creating Community in the Canal Zone Neocolony," *Global South* 6, no. 2 (2013): 87–106. On an earlier period of depopulation, see Lasso, *Erased*.

[99] Canal Zone officials also avoided school desegregation by reclassifying silver schools as "Latin American" schools, with instruction to be offered in Spanish for the first time. Gold schools were

The strategic alliance did produce some important results for the anti-racist cause in the republic. A decade after pressuring the Panamanian government to draft a new, less prejudicial constitution, Westerman and his allies succeeded in passing the Heurtematte Law of 1956, which criminalized discrimination in commercial establishments. The preamble to the bill cited both the new Panamanian Constitution of 1946 and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[100] Westerman went on to become Panama's ambassador to the United Nations in the late 1950s. But as in the Canal Zone, the ethno-racial hierarchy that shaped society in the republic persisted, even as West Indian Panamanians succeeded in removing the explicit legislation that formally propped it up and passing further legislation meant to tear it down. Darker-skinned Panamanians continued to struggle to find work in the republic, often lacked access to social services, and disproportionately populated urban shantytowns. As a larger cross-section of political parties courted the *criollo* vote, the once-recognizable political bloc became increasingly divided. The 1950s witnessed the mass departure of West Indian Panamanians from the isthmus, many bound for the United States.

In the end, the practical outcome of the 1955 treaty revealed the perils of hitching together anti-racist struggles playing out in different registers in pursuit of different objectives. In Panama, doing so subsumed race and class concerns to a vertical framework of nationalism. What was good for Panama in the international sphere was not equally good for all Panamanians.

Of course, 1955 did not mark the end of domestic struggles against racism in Panama or Panamanian international struggles against imperialism. In 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, inspiring many Panamanians to seek the same end. As African and Asian colonies became independent, the quasi-colonial status of the Canal Zone became increasingly flagrant and dated. In a move once considered unimaginable, Panama began to call for the U.S. to turn the canal over to Panamanian control in the name of national sovereignty.[101] Decolonization marked a continued assault on racial barriers to self-rule in the international arena and presented Panamanian administrations and activists with yet another powerful language with which to challenge U.S. power in racialized terms.

But just as anti-imperialism and domestic race politics mapped onto one another in

reclassified as "U.S. schools" with English instruction, preserving them for white U.S. citizens. School conversion was executed to avoid enforcement of the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared school segregation unconstitutional in the United States. A Canal Zone governor in the 1940s, while going to great lengths to obscure racial explanations for the gold-silver divisions in nearly all areas of Canal Zone segregation, was unabashed about racial segregation in the Zone's schools. He justified this practice there, noting that they followed "the same distinctions that are in effect in the public school systems of many parts of the United States." Governor Glen E. Edgerton, memorandum to Chief of Office, April 15, 1944, enclosure to Muccio to Secretary of State, April 28, 1944.

[100] "RP Assembly Gets Measure against Discrimination," *Panama American*, January 11, 1956.

[101] See Conte Porras, *Del tratado Hay–Bunau Varilla a los tratados Torrijos-Carter*; Reymundo Gurdián Guerra, "Los Tratados del Canal de Panamá y su transferencia, 1967–1999," in Castillero Calvo, *Historia general de Panamá*, vol. 3, book 2, 271–272; Omar Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los tratados Torrijos-Carter, 1970–1979* (Panama City, 2005); LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*; Fitzgerald, *Historia de la relaciones entre Panamá y Estados Unidos*; Major, *Prize Possession*; Alan McPherson, "Courts of World Opinion: Trying the Panama Flag Riots of 1964," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (2004): 83–112.

different ways during the early Good Neighbor era, World War II, the democratic spring, and the early Cold War, that dynamic changed further still in the 1960s. By this time, Panamanian administrations pressed their case in the international sphere on behalf of a generically mestizo Panamanian *pueblo* denied rightful rule over its territory. To be sure, black Panamanians of West Indian descent participated in the nationalist movement to gain Panamanian control over the canal during this period, but they did not by and large organize as a distinct political bloc in that endeavor, and accordingly, their support for the anti-imperialist cause did not amount to leverage for combating persisting racism at home. If the power of the *criollo* vote under Westerman's leadership grew from a strategy of embracing Panamanian identity to redefine it in more inclusive terms, the political imperative of attending to distinct *criollo* interests became a casualty of that project's success.

Anti-racist struggles in the republic revived and took on new formulations with the rise of the Black Movement in Panama in the late 1960s and 1970s, which explicitly critiqued the extent to which articulations of ethnic nationalism, more inclusive than they once had been, still masked the persisting reality of racial inequality in Panamanian society. Various organizations worked to unite black Panamanians of both "colonial" and West Indian origin with class- and race-based agendas for equality.[102] Adherents to this movement reflected openly on the experience of blackness in Panama, fostered black consciousness, and asserted pluralist visions for Panamanian citizenship. Some of them mobilized to support the popular dictator Omar Torrijos in his negotiations with the U.S. government, which culminated in 1977, when he and U.S. president Jimmy Carter signed the Carter-Torrijos Treaties, setting the terms under which the canal would finally be transferred to Panama by the end of the century. They did so as a racially identified bloc. In some ways, their role paralleled that which Westerman and his allies had played in the Remón administration, but they were more wary of subsuming race-based objectives to a nationalist cause.[103]

Panama is a distinctive place in many ways, and the Canal Zone even more so. But all ethnic and racial hierarchies are forged in the particularities of place and time. What is generalizable is the fact of interconnectedness between international and domestic hierarchies, and the mid-century moment offers a particularly clear window through which to view those connections. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, something surprising happened: In a matter of years, the international order transformed from one justified by racial hierarchy to one predicated on the rejection of racism. The most avid policemen of international racial order began to pay lip service to a vision for world peace that rested on a community of sovereign nations that were equal regardless of

[102] See, for instance, Gerardo Maloney and George Priestley, "El grupo antillano en el proceso político panameño," *Tareas*, no. 33 (September–November 1975): 11–27; Priestley, "Ethnicity, Class and the National Question in Panama"; and George Priestley, "Afro-antillanos o Afro-panameños: La participación política y las políticas de identidad durante y después de las negociaciones de los tratados Torrijos-Carter," in Alberto Barrow and George Priestley, eds., *Piel oscura Panamá: Ensayos y reflexiones al filo del centenario* (Panama City, 2003), 185–231.

[103] See George Priestley, "Antillean-Panamanians or Afro-Panamanians? Political Participation and the Politics of Identity during the Carter-Torrijos Treaty Negotiations," *Transforming Anthropology* 12, no. 1–2 (2004): 50–67.

their inhabitants' skin colors. Of course, the disjuncture between rhetoric and reality was stark, but in that disjuncture, Panamanians from the Foreign Ministry to the Canal Zone labor camps saw opportunity.

The Second World War did not take a racist world and turn it anti-racist, but the shift in norms and rhetoric created opportunities for those disadvantaged by racism domestically, and those plenty guilty of domestic racism who suffered from it internationally. The use of anti-racist language, by a variety of actors to a variety of ends, created a cascade of vulnerabilities. The place of race in the geopolitical conflicts that followed the war generated new openings and new constraints. In this dialectical manner, a diverse cast of characters reshaped the contours and mechanisms of racial order at home and abroad, if not in the ways that many had hoped.

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